



Montgomery County Council

For Immediate Release

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Silverman: Protecting the Public is #1 Concern...

COUNCIL HEARS FROM WSSC, ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP ON COUNTY WATER QUALITY

The Montgomery County Council today convened a discussion on the recently-released report issued by the Environmental Working Group alleging that chlorination byproducts in water provided by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission could be harmful to expectant mothers.

Joining Councilmembers for the session were Jane Houlihan of the Environmental Working Group, WSSC director John Griffin, County Health Officer Dr. Carol Garvey, and County Department of Environmental Protection director Jim Caldwell.

"We are all concerned that County residents have safe drinking water and WSSC has done a good job," said Council President Steve Silverman, citing WSSC's long record of meeting or exceeding all federal water quality standards. "Still, expectant mothers need to be assured that we are doing everything possible to make sure that what comes out of the tap is safe."

The report from the national environmental research organization contended that the bi-county WSSC service area had the highest number of pregnancies in the nation exposed for at least three months to at least 80 parts per billion of trihalomethanes (THM), a chlorination by-product (CBP). But the report also showed that, for the overall period of October 1995 to April 2001, the WSSC's level of THMs was 55.1 parts per billion, well below the average annual federal standard of 80.

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The report also called for creation of better health tracking to understand people's exposure to CBPs and an improved national effort to protect source water for all surface-supplied water systems.

"Montgomery County does an excellent job of protecting source water," said Dr. Carol Garvey. She noted that chlorination has been critically important to protecting public health and that the impact of CBPs on reproductive health has not been clearly established.

"Given the history of environmental pollutants, we have to ask the questions," said Councilmember Derick Berlage. "Regional cooperation in protecting our water is very important to dealing with this issue," he said, noting that runoff pollution from counties and states north of Montgomery County has an impact on County water quality.

Houlihan of the EWG praised the County's record on land use and water quality. She also praised WSSC's performance, noting that the CBP problem is intensified by the system's downstream location and large size and by periods of drought.

The Council referred the water quality issue to the Transportation and Environment Committee for further action and monitoring, including verification of EWG's data and fluctuations in CBP levels within the WSSC service area.

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